

# The Green Hills

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The green hills, covered in tall trees, went on for miles into the distance. At the feet of these hills, to the east, were open fields of green grass and flowers of many colors. Red, blue, yellow, and purple to name just a few. The open fields had a few trees here and there, overlooking the ocean of green, home to many of the winged creatures that belonged to this little place on the face of the big earth. To the east of the green land, there was a mysterious forest that hardly anyone ventured into. There are many tall tales and fascinating stories of this forest, many of which are just tales parents use to frighten their children, but nobody knows for sure what went on in the forest.

The Grunkel Woods, it was called by many, its name coming from older times when there were but few men and many more creatures wandering the land. The men, arriving relatively recently, took it for themselves, in doing so, drove many of the animals into the Grunkel Woods, from where they seldom returned. The men turned the land into farmland and raised various things including potatoes, wheat, barley, rye, fruits, vegetables, and of course, milk. Everyone enjoyed the milk for it came from the healthiest and happiest cows, which spent their days grazing about the Greenland. The milk itself was said to have healing powers and to give the drinker strength needed in difficult times.

On one of the farms, far from the rest of them, lived a poor, humble family of three. Their farm wasn't the biggest, but it provided the family with the resources they needed to survive and sometimes a bit more. The family: a father, mother, and their son,

were a hard working family, always attending to the farm and the many of the animals that lived there.

The Mossholder's, as was their surname, were a shy, but productive family. Ferdinand, the father, was a tall, strong man with short wavy hair and a short but thick beard. His eyes were light green and shone very brightly in the day. Abigail, the mother, had eyes of the deepest blue, a very beautiful blue like a calm sea. She wore luscious locks of golden brown hair which hung down to her waist. She was shorter than Ferdinand, but a strong woman nonetheless.

Their son, Axel, was a talkative child. He had Short wavy hair that he tucked behind his ears. His eyes were a mixture of his parents' eyes for they were bluish green. He liked to sit on tree stumps and stare at the skies, waiting for animals to come by so he could talk with them. He did this all day until his father whistled for him, telling supper was almost ready. "Axel!" he'd shout and he would come running in, but he was never alone. August, the family dog, followed Axel everywhere he went. The dog had short, brown hair and was half as tall as Axel. The two were always together and loved each other very much.

Recently there have been strange clouds coming from beyond the Grunkel Woods. Dark, heavy clouds which rained not water, but ash. The ash created many problems on the farm. It dried up the ground and at times even blocked sunlight. Sometimes it was so bad, people couldn't be outside or else they would take breaths of ash instead of air. The clouds could be seen rising from the tall, gloomy mountain in the distance. The tip of the mountain stood high above everything else and was visible from

all around. No one had ever gone to the mountain, for to get there one would have to go through the Grunkel Woods, a feat which had not yet been accomplished.

One beautiful day, as the sun was inching its way towards the west, thick, black clouds became apparent, spewing from the mountain. Axel, sitting on a tree stump, saw this and said, "Gee, August! Those clouds are mighty big." August looked up at his master and agreed with his big, brown eyes for he could not speak like men as some animals could. Flashes of light suddenly burst from the clouds. "Oh no!" Axel said. "Lightning! This looks bad. We'd better get home quickly. The clouds are moving fast!" Axel and August ran off together towards their home, with the dark clouds chasing behind.

Axel and August ran through the tall grass, Axel glancing over his shoulder, saw the ash cloud and jumped at the sound of thunder. As he reached his house, his father came around the back. "Axel! I was just about to go find you," said Ferdinand. He was carrying in a bag of food. "Hurry, take this inside to your mother. We cannot leave anything of value outside." Ferdinand handed off the bag of food to Axel, but a noise stopped him in front of the door. August was barking. He was howling loudly at the advancing cloud, trying to stop it in its tracks and make it go the other direction, but the menacing cloud kept going. Axel watched his dog snarl and growl, and attempted to make him go inside, but August was fixed on the cloud.

"August! Please! Come inside," yelled Axel, whistling for his dog, "You aren't safe out here!" The dog looked up at Axel and stared into his eyes. Suddenly, August began running towards the cloud, which was now above the Grunkel Woods. "AUGUST!

NO! COME BACK!” Axel screamed. He began to run towards his dog, but something caught him and picked him up. It was his father.

“Axel, listen to me,” Ferdinand said as he carried Axel in one arm and the bag of food in the other, “You mustn’t worry. August is a smart dog he will find safety eventually, but you must remain here. It would be an unbearable pain to see you both disappear into the ash.” Axel was thrashing about trying to go after his best friend, but his father’s grip was a strong one. The last thing Axel saw before the door was locked shut was August running in to the Grunkel Woods, his heart sank into his stomach. Thunder boomed all throughout the green land, ash covered the farms, the trees, and the Mossholder house.

As the sun was just peaking over the Grunkel Woods, Axel awoke coughing. The ash had even got in the house. His parents were already up, sitting at the small table together drinking milk. Their faces were long with sadness and they had bags under their eyes. Ferdinand motioned for Axel to sit next to them as soon as he sat up. “Father...” Axel started, but his father interrupted him.

“I know what you must do,” said his father as he stood up and walked to the door. Axel’s was surprised to here this from his father. He looked over to his mother and she smiled back at him through her solemn face. “It is not long before the sun is high, you should set off soon if you don’t want to get the full fury of the sun.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Axel, thinking maybe he was still asleep dreaming. He looked at his father, into his green eyes and the answer came to him. He

had to go find August. Ferdinand held up a backpack and opened the door. Axel stood, speechless.

“You must find him. He’s out there looking for you.” Ferdinand stood by the open door. Axel walked over, but heard his mother stand and turned to look at her.

“Here, take this,” Abigail was holding a green cloak which she put on Axel, “it will keep you warm at night time and it is fairly light for the day time. I trust in you, son, to return to us safely with August by your side.” Her deep blue eyes and sincere smile comforted Axel, as did the cloak she had given him. It was green with a hood that fitted perfectly on Axel’s head. Turning towards the door, he grabbed the backpack his father was holding and slung it across his back.

“There are a few tools in there which should come in handy.” Ferdinand reached into the backpack and pulled out a knife as an example. “Whilst you were fast asleep this morning, your mother and I prepared food for your journey, also milk to quench your thirst and give you strength. It should last you a few nights if you conserve it well.” He nodded at Axel and motioned towards the open door, “Hurry, and be safe.”

Axel stepped out the door, walked a few paces, and turned to look at his parents. They were smiling brightly, so brightly that it seemed as if they lit up the gloomy, ashy area around them. He waved to them, and turned towards the Grunkel Woods, but noticed something peculiar. He stood there, what was before him made him frightened and angered. Axel saw how the ash storm had ravaged the green land. The natural green did not show through as always, but instead all was black, enclosed in ash. What was once fair was now covered in a thick blanket of darkness. Even the sky was still murky.

Axel wrapped a bandana around his nose and mouth to keep the black dust out, but his eyes still watered for they were not covered. He walked at a quick pace for his gear was light and August was in his mind. *Don't worry buddy, I'm on my way.*

Axel soon reached the Grunkel Woods. The trees were taller than he had thought, rising high above his head. They were very old trees, some grown into each other, intertwining.

Set in place, Axel looked around, but there was no way around the forest, he had to go through. He felt goosebumps all over his body, and his hand began to tremble slightly. He was beginning to feel nervous, he hadn't really thought about going through the forest.

A branch above Axel shifted and caught his attention. There, on the branch, was perched an owl staring back at him. The owl cocked his head to one side and leaned forward towards Axel. "Now, Whooo are yooou?" the owl asked in man-tongue. Axel was taken aback. "Whoowat are yooou doing around this forest all by yourself?" questioned the owl.

"I..."Axel stumbled for words, "I'm going into the Grunkel Woods, to... to find my doggie!" he responded. "Have you seen him? His name is August. He's got brown hair and..."

"I have not," interrupted the owl, "but if I do I will tell him you are looking for him. In the mean while, I shall entertain myself here with you for only a brief moment, for I have matters to attend to," said the owl. Axel didn't feel threatened by the owl, but he did feel uncomfortable. He wanted to be on his way. The owl seemed to notice his

troubled mind, "I shall keep it short, do not worry." Axel heard the owl and relaxed just a little.

"Tell me, owl, why do you stall me?" Axel said half frustrated, half curious.

"You say your dog ran off into the forest?" the owl asked, Axel nodded. "Well, I have an idea where he may be headed" At this Axel became very attentive to the owl.

"He is probably headed to the Felserde Mountain. A dangerous path he has chosen."

"How do I get there?! I must get there!" shouted Axel.

"Hooow to get there? You must head northeast, towards the Klarwasser Lake. No doubt in my head that you can see the peak of the mountain from any high point for it is the highest point, believe me, I have been there myself."

"Why thank you wise owl! But I must be on my way, I have much to travel. I hope to see you again," said Axel gratefully.

"I shall be seeing you more than you think. Farwell...for now," said the owl as he spread his wings and took flight from the branch. Hooting, he disappeared over the trees. Axel looked at the trees, puffed out his chest, and shouted, "For August!" and stepped into the Grunkel Woods.

Axel had been walking through the trees cautiously, avoiding large spider webs and tree roots sticking out of the ground. After a few minutes of walking he slowed down, he had heard a familiar voice. Hiding behind a tree he peaked in the direction of the voice, it was the rooster from his parent's farm, Emery! The rooster was accompanied by two hens, one on each side. Axel was relieved, yet somewhat perplexed. He stepped from behind the tree and greeted the company, "Emery! What are you doing here?"

For a split second the rooster seemed alarmed, but as soon as he saw it was Axel he was delighted, “Axel! Thank goodness you’re okay! The storm was terrible!” Axel kneeled and gave the rooster a hug, “These two hens and I ran without stopping once we saw the immense cloud coming. I knew trouble was brewing. I figured we’d be safe in the forest seeing as the trees are tall and the branches are lengthy.” Axel looked around and saw very minimal trace of ash in the forest. The trees had caught most of the ash. “I was on my way back to the farm just now. Tell me, what brings you here?”

“Its August, he’s run off deep into the forest. I was searching for him.” Axel replied. His stomach grumbled and he put his hand over his belly. He had not eaten anything before leaving his house.

“I see, poor August, I hope you find him. But not without eating first! You must have your energy!” said the rooster. The two hens stepped forward and from under their wings came an egg each. “We have no use for these, they will not hatch, but you men seem to enjoy them. Here,” the rooster pushed the eggs toward Axel, “take them. If you don’t find them useful as food, then may they be useful to you otherwise.” The eggs were shiny white and as smooth as an untouched lake. They were relatively heavy for their small size. Axel took them and put them carefully in his backpack. “We must be on our way, there is much help needed, I assume, on the farm. Goodbye and good luck!”

“Thank you Emery, for your kindness. And I will be sure to tell father when I get back. Send them my regards.” Axel said gratefully. Emery the rooster and the two hens started off and soon disappeared in the trees.

The sun was now in the center of the sky, but only a few rays of sunlight leaked through the trees here and there. Axel continued in the direction he set off in, more and more eager to find August.

An hour or two passed by and still Axel could only see trees, all of the same kind. He began to get desperate, *It all looks the same! What if I already passed this and I'm going in circles!* His pace quickened. Then he heard something horrifying. **ROOAAAR!** A mighty roar it was! Axel stopped dead in his tracks, his heartbeat pounding in his chest like a hammer to an anvil.

There it was, the great creature who had just roared, a huge, brown bear standing on its hind legs. "I smell you, whatever you are. Do not hide. Come out in the open where I can see you." growled the bear. The bear's nose was pointed up and he was sniffing vigorously. Axel stepped out into the open, shaking from fear of the bear. "Ah tis only a man-cub. You are no bigger than a cub of my own, come young one I will not harm you," the bear said calmly.

Axel was very hesitant and tense. "Tell me, what do they call you little man?" asked the bear.

"I...I...I'm not telling you until you tell me what your name is!" cried Axel puffing his chest out.

"HAHAHA!" laughed the bear loudly, "Why, you've got a bit of fierce bear in you. HAH!" Axel's puffed out chest diminished. "Well since you insist, I go by the name Kaiser. And I come from a long line of prestigious bears, like myself," said the bear

pompously. Kaiser lowered himself down to all fours. He seemed less intimidating this way. He walked over to Axel, sniffing the air as he went.

“I smell... *sniff sniff*... food! Oh goody! Will you please share some?!” implored Kaiser.

“Errm... I don’t think I can,” responded Axel cautiously, “It’s for my travels, and I need the energy.”

“Well if you wont share...,” Kaiser again raised him self to his hind legs, to his full height. Axel fell backward against a tree and heard a *crack*.

“Oh no! My eggs!” said Axel as he forgot the huge bear and turned to his backsack. As he opened it, he knew the eggs were not in one smooth piece anymore. They were completely smashed and the egg yolk was all over the place, making a big mess in his backsack. This frustrated Axel to the point of tears, “My eggs...,” he said in between tears and breaths.

“Oh dear,” Kaiser said. As menacing as he seemed, he felt sorry for Axel. “I’m sorry little one, I didn’t mean to frighten you, I was just kidding around,” he said sincerely. He knew he had done something wrong and his face brightened up for a second, “I have an idea.” Axel looked up at Kaiser with his red, watery eyes. “I know of a river near by where I catch fish to eat, I could take you there and catch you some tasty fish to make up for your broken eggs.”

“Does this river lead to a lake?” asked Axel, now excited.

“Yes it does. Are you looking for the lake?” said the bear.

“Well I’m looking for the Felserde Mountain, but the lake sits right at its feet, so yes I am. Please take me to this river!” demanded Axel.

“Tomorrow, early in the morning, we will depart for the river, but now it is too late in the day,” said Kaiser promisingly. Axel looked around, not many sunrays were shining through the trees, it was getting late. “Come, follow me. I shall take you to the cave where I live. It is closer to the river than here.”

“Why thank you!” said Axel gratefully. *It may be his fault that my eggs broke, but at least he’s helping me out,* thought Axel to himself. Onwards they went into the thicket of trees.

Soon they arrived to the bear’s cave. It was in the side of a large hill. The hill had trees growing all over it, save the entrance of the cave. “Welcome, man-cub, to my home,” said Kaiser taking Axel into his cave. “Here we rest till the morning. Sleep now, I will waken you in the morrow.”

Axel nodded in approval and laid to rest in the opposite corner of Kaiser, in a small nest of tall grasses. It had been a long day for Axel and he very much needed rest and energy. He dozed off into the dreamland as soon as his eyelids touched. Off in the distance, the mountain stood high and mighty. The black smoke emitting from behind it lessened as the sun set to the west, the flames slowly died into the night, only to be lit up as soon as the sun rose from the east.

Axel awoke in the morning, opening his eyelids to sunbeams just barely shooting through the trees. He stirred up and looked around the cave. Kaiser was still fast asleep. Axel chuckled at this. The bear’s belly rose and lowered with each breath. “*I will waken you in the morrow,*” he said mocking the bear. He went over to the bear and began to poke, push, and pull, but the bear would not even stir. Axel became angered and punched

the bear as hard as he could but not even that would wake the bear. Then Axel got an idea. He ran over to his backpack and pulled out some bread that his parents had given him. The bread was honeybread made by his mother and the aroma given from it made Axel's mouth water. He went over to Kaiser and waved a loaf near his nose. Kaiser's nose began to twitch and his head moved towards the bread. "Hahaha," laughed Axel, "It seems as though the only thing that motivates you is food!" Kaiser finally opened his eyes and saw the boy holding the loaf of bread.

"Oh dear, that is quiet embarrassing," said the bear as he sat up. "Why so early? I need my sleep. Do you man-cubs not need sleep?" he asked sarcastically.

"We do, we're just not as lazy as you bears!" laughed Axel. They prepared their breakfast which consisted of bread and milk and ate for a while. They set off to the river, the air was hot and the sunrays plenty.

After an hour or two, Axel was beginning to see less and less trees. "We are close now, can you not hear the river?" asked Kaiser. Axel perked his ears up.

"I can! It sounds very close, we must hurry!" said Axel desperately. They walked faster until Axel could see the river through the trees, "There it is!" He rushed to the river and felt the sunlight bath his body. He took in a deep breath and went to splash water in his face. "Auuggghh!" he shouted in disgust. "This is not clean water!" Axel looked down at the water and realized that the water was not a clear blue, but instead a murky blue, nearly brownish. He looked up the river and saw this murky water till it reached the lake off in the far distance.

"Yes, it is quite sad. The fish I catch no longer have the same meaty taste, instead a dirty, foul taste. But fish is all I eat." Kaiser said looking down at the river, watching

the sick looking fish swim by. He raised his paw and held it steady. As fast as a dart, he reached into the river with lightening speed, pulling out three live fish. He swiftly ended their lives with a nearby rock and quickly scaled and gutted each one. Axel watched, interested, and looked off at the lake and the mountain behind it for the first time. He marveled at the size of the mountain, the Felserde Mountain. Seeing the mountain only made Axel more anxious to find August. "I'm sorry Kaiser, but I must be on my way to the mountain," he pointed at the distant peak.

"Take this before you go," Kaiser handed Axel a fish, "eat it raw, it will give you more energy that way."

"Thank you kind bear, you are really as prestigious as you say. At first you frightened me, but your kindness has erased that image of you from my mind. I hope to see you in the future again," said Axel. He smiled at the bear and the bear smiled back

"Have a good journey my friend and keep safe!" Kaiser replied. At that, he turned and ran back into the forest, to go enjoy his fish. Axel, now alone, began to walk towards the mountain, its menacing size imposed in his eyes.

The sun was on its way down, getting ready to rest after all day of being in the sky. Axel was sitting on a rock next to the river. He had been walking for a few hours and began to feel fatigue. Up ahead was a clearing of trees with tall grass growing. He began to walk towards the grass when he saw it move. He stopped walking and inspected the grass. Axel saw antlers pop up through the tall grass and was relieved it wasn't another bear. It was a moose perusing about in the grass. Axel approached it, carefully, "Hello

there moose. What is your name?" The moose looked up at Axel slowly. Its large brown eyes looked over Axel. It started towards Axel, but stopped as it stepped out of the grass.

"I am pleased to see a stranger, maybe you can help me," said the moose, "My name is Milo and I have a big problem," the moose said weakly. "I have not had anything to drink for the past two days. The last ash storm contaminated the lake and the water is foul, I cannot drink it. Do you have anything you can spare me? I am in dire need of liquid!"

"I do, Milo! Here drink from my canteen. It is the finest milk from the healthiest cows. It will do you good!" Axel said as he reached into his backpack for his canteen. He walked over to the moose, who indeed looked weak. His legs trembled under his weight. Axel poured some milk down into Milo's dry throat.

"My, my! This milk is so good! I feel better already!" said Milo energetically. "Could you spare any more?" begged the moose.

"Sure!" answered Axel as he poured more milk into Milo's mouth. Milo licked his lips and took a deep breath. He straightened out to his full height and width, he seemed much larger now. Axel was barely the size of one of the moose's legs.

"Ah. I feel...rejuvenated! Thank you little boy! I didn't catch your name, what was it?"

"Axel... Axel Mossholder."

"Well, Axel Mossholder, if there's anything I can do to repay your kindness please ask of me," said Milo. "Do you need a ride perhaps?"

“A ride would be very nice! I must get to the mountain and find my dog August who ran away during the last ash storm. Could you do that for me?” inquired Axel now feeling good about getting to the mountain.

“But of course, young Axel. I may not be the fastest out there, but I am a sturdy moose and have a great deal of stamina. Climb on,” he bent down so Axel could get on, “and let us be on our way, to the mountain!” Axel held on to Milo and off they went. The sun setting to the west gave Axel a sleepy feeling. That night was the first night Axel could see the sky, the stars shining brightly, but more importantly the near full moon that was rising. Axel gazed upon the moon and the stars and lost himself in thoughts of his lost dog and of his parents. He missed all three very much. Eventually he gave way to tiredness and fell asleep on Milo’s back, but Milo kept going. The Felserde Mountain was getting closer and closer.

Axel opened his eyes slowly, blinking them often. When he looked around he was in disbelief. They were already at the lake. The mountain was right in front of them. Milo was still walking. “Milo, have you been walking all night?” asked Axel.

“Yes, and I still have strength in me,” said Milo swinging his antlers from side to side. Axel looked up at the mountain before them. It struck fear into his heart.

“Can we head towards the smoke? I have a feeling my dog is around there,” Axel said.

“I do not know how far I can take you due to the terrain. I may not be able to get up the mountain. In that case you would have to go by yourself.” Milo lowered down so

Axel could get off. Axel sniffed the air, it was thick with a smell of burning wood. He could taste the ash.

“I must hurry on now Milo! But not before I give you my praises. You are one strong moose. I hope to see you again my friend!” Axel shouted down to the moose for he was now climbing over the side of the mountain. He had to get to the other side as quick as he could.

“Thank you, Axel! Without your mighty milk I would have died of thirst! I shall be waiting on this side.” Milo shouted back. He turned and went to look for some grass.

Axel ran now over rocks and loose stones. He could almost see over to the other side. The Grunkel Woods stretched around the mountain, but behind the mountain, where the trees once stood tall, only tree stumps and charred trunks could be seen. There was a section of tall dead trees with writhed branches, but no leaves on them. Axel stood there, staring in disgust at the horrible deforestation that was going on.

There were sections of what used to be forest missing, gone because of forest fires. This is what had been causing the ash clouds. When the smoke clouds rose up to the mountain, they combined with the rain clouds coming in and

“AXEL!” shouted a voice. Axel jumped at the sudden yell. “I was expecting you,” said the owl as he landed in a nearby branch. “I’m surprised you made it this far. You are determined.” Axel looked at the owl, but was too confused to say anything. “I have good news and bad news for you.”

“Did you find August?!” shouted Axel.

“I know of his whereabouts yes, but there is a bad side to this news. A mysterious hooded man has caught your dog.” When Axel heard this he became very nervous and

scared. He felt the sweat drip off of his forehead and the shaking of his hands. “You will find him near the dying willow. Axel ran off into the dead trees.

The ground was covered in ash for the trees have no leaves to catch the ash. From where he stood he could see the willow tree, it was taller than the rest of the trees. It was still relatively green compared to the other trees that were pale and leafless. Axel let his feet and the thought of August take him to the tree.

The willow stood out from the rest of the trees, it was different species than them. Its branches reaching down to the ground, they made a dome around it. Axel heard a faint noise, *What was that? Sounded like a whimper*, he thought to himself. **BAARK!** He was sure that was his dog! “August! I’m coming!” Axel ran into the willow.

Inside the willow it was dark and Axel’s eyes had to adjust. “Hello young adventurer.” The voice frightened Axel, but he knew August was somewhere in there. The voice was actually two different voices, a male and a female voice. Axel then thought there were two different people talking to him, which made him really tense. “You go by Axel do you not?” asked the voice. Axel just nodded. “What are you doing so far from your little farm house?” asked the voice. Axel was surprised by the question.

“How do you know so much about me?” asked Axel. In the dark he saw the outline of the voice. The outline stepped forward into a sunray poking through the willow’s leaves. It was a hooded figure, its face was in complete darkness.

“I am Vahrshheit!” it shouted, “Knower of all truth!” Its voice boomed throughout the trees. “Please do not waste my time by answering my question with a childish question of yours!” The sudden loudness of the voice made Axel jump.

“I... I... I’m looking for my lost dog, August. Have you seen him?” ask Axel

“You mean this little hound?” Vahrheit faded into the shadows and reappeared a second later with August in his arms. Axel nearly lunged at the hooded figure holding his best friend. August and Axel looked at each other and August whimpered

“Why do you have my dog?” demanded Axel.

“You could say I just found him.”

“Give him back! He’s my dog!”

“You must do me a favor first,” Vahrheit insisted. “This forest is my home. I have lived here since the beginning. But being destroyed by reckless fires as I watch. I cannot do anything about the fires, but you can. There is a dammed up river that comes from the mountain. The water that the river carries is pure water, clean. If you were to unblock this river, this water would put out the fires and give life where it once stood.”

Axel, without hesitation, chose to help Vahrheit in exchange for August. “I will help you, but you must stick to your word,” said Axel

“Good, Good...” Vahrheit breathed and picked up his staff. He snapped his fingers and in an instant they were by the dammed river.

“Woah! What just happened?!” yelled Axel, very confusedly.

“No time to talk, unblock the river! The fires move quickly. They will reach my willow if you don’t hurry” Vahrheit yelled. Axel looked out at the view. They were on the mountain now.

The dam was made of very large wooded logs. Axel tried to push them off but some were too big. He was struggling and pushing hard till sweat broke out on his forehead, but it seemed as he was getting nothing done. Suddenly he remembered his

milk! That would help anybody out of a tight situation. He pulled out his canteen and drank every last drop of milk.

“Ahh now I feel refreshed!” said Axel with a new confidence. He went up to one of the logs and gave it his strongest push. It came loose! With that one log loose, all the others became loose as well and tumbling down went the dam. “Yaaay! I did it!”

The river rushed by them, out into the trees below taking out any fires in its way. The steam from the fires rose up and seemed to clear the smoke cloud that was resting above them. The dark cloud dissipated and the land seemed to brighten up. The sun shone through and lit up the green lands. A new cloud began to form, a white cloud. This cloud grew heavier and heavier.

Axel turned to Vahrsheit, “Look a rain cloud! It’s going to rain!”

“Yes, I knew this would proceed to happen,” said Vahrsheit. He raised his hands to his hood and drew it back. To Axel’s astonishment, there wasn’t a head upon the shoulder’s of Vahrsheit, but an eyeball! “The rain will refresh my far sightings into the future,” it said, “You have done your side of the bargain, now it is my turn.”

From behind Vahrsheit came August running and barking happily. He sprang into his master’s open arms, “Oh August! How much I missed you!” cried Axel, a tear coming down his cheek. “Please, never run away again! I saved this for you,” Axel pulled out the fish from his backsack and threw it to August, who happily gulp down it down.

“Axel, you have done well. You are among the few who are truthfully strong, not just physically.” Vahrsheit patted Axel on the head with its boney hand. The male/female voice was now stronger, “It is time for you to return home where you are needed. Great things will become of you, for I can now see properly. My vision is no longer clouded.”

Its hands and sleeves slowly began to morph, its eyeball head began to shrink and a beak began to protrude, feathers grew in. A familiar shape it was turning into right before Axel's eyes. An owl!

“You were the owl?!” exclaimed Axel.

“Yes, I can take many forms, but the owl is my favorite,” said Vahrheit, “It began to *hoot* and flap its wings. “Hop on, I will fly you to your farm house.” Axel mounted Vahrheit with August in his arms. They flew over the Klarwasser Lake which had cleared up, as well as the rivers. No more murky water, it was now pure water. The ash was all being washed off by the rain, leaving areas brighter and cleaner. As they flew over the Grunkel Woods, Axel thought he may have heard a loud roar, a bear roar.

Vahrheit the owl dropped them off where Axel had began his journey into the Grunkel Woods, the location of their first meeting. “You will be safe from here Axel,” Axel jumped off and put August on the ground. “Keep true to yourself and you will always succeed. Farewell... for now *hoo hoo*” The owl took off into the distance.

Axel and August ran home side by side. They made so much noise that his parents already knew of his return. “Son! You've made it back with August!” said his father. “We shall celebrate with a toast of milk!” Both his parents ran and hugged him, and of course gave August a scratch on the belly. And so the Mossholders lived happily on their newly prosperous farms for years and years to come.